

'Aumākua (Guardian Ancestors) in the Context of Contemporary Hawaiian Religious Beliefs

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INTRODUCTION

This paper concerns traditional as well as modern beliefs about Hawaiian 'aumākua, personal or family gods that originated as deified ancestors. They may take on physical forms such as spirit vehicles. An 'aumakua (plural, 'aumākua) may be manifested in a shark, owl, bird, octopus, selected plants, or even rocks.

The first Europeans to reach Hawai'i arrived with Captain

traditional Hawaiian beliefs and rituals have survived the impact of western culture and Christianity. If we compare recorded traditional beliefs with contemporary Hawaiian religious views, perhaps it will bring us a clearer understanding. My research indicates that 'aumākua beliefs, but not 'aumākua ritual, have persisted into modern times. 'Aumākua traditions are related to the idea of family. Extended family and traditional 'aumākua beliefs have survived the abandonment of the kapu system as well as western culture and its belief system. The Hawaiian family remains rooted in the past because of the retention of traditional beliefs and ideas of 'aumākua. The interaction and veneration of deceased family members who have been transformed to 'aumākua is a core tradition that has endured into modern times.

The widespread Polynesian idea of guardian ancestors or 'aumākua have no clear depictions in Hawaiian art. We may assume a relationship, however, for all religion and art in Polynesia are interconnected. For this reason, I have provided a few illustrations suggesting connections between art and 'aumākua.

To answer these questions, a preliminary review of recorded traditional beliefs and rituals concerning 'aumākua is necessary. Mary Kawena Pukui's work *Nānā I ke Kumu (Look to the Source)* is a key source for this subject. Her work is the backbone of this paper. Pukui was a native Hawaiian, raised in a family that held traditional beliefs of 'aumākua and the spirit world. Her work provides a systematic and clear description of 'aumākua beliefs and ritual, and lends itself to methodological ethnographic comparison and inquiry. Her ideas on 'aumākua are consistent with the writings of early Hawaiian scholars such as David Malo and Samuel Kamakau.

The second part of this study is an analysis of my ethnographic field interviews conducted during the years

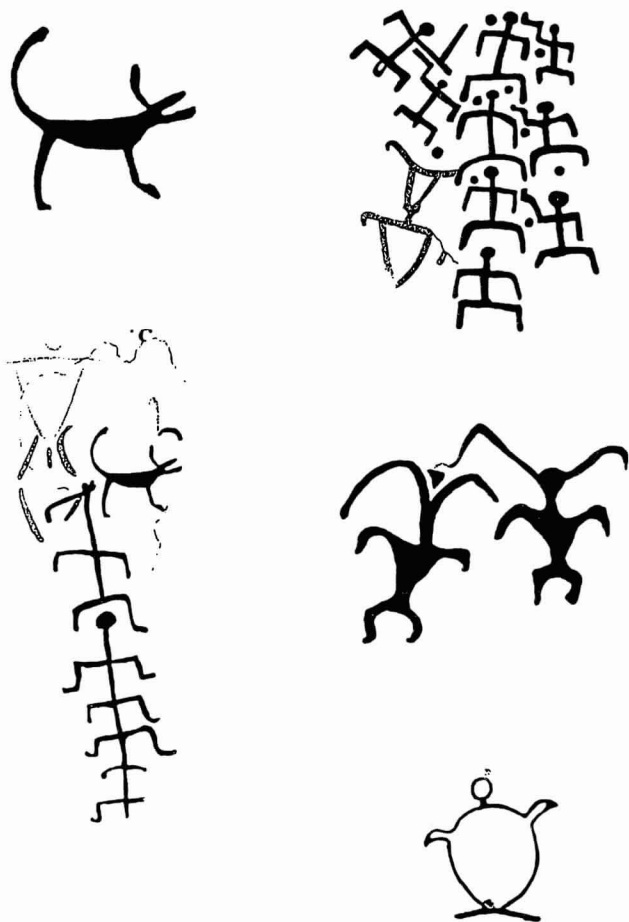


Figure 1. These five Hawaiian petroglyphs are reproduced from *Spirit of Place: The Petroglyphs of Hawai'i*, Georgia Lee and Edward Stasack. They are closely related to magic and in turn to ancestor spirits and 'aumākua manifestations such as the dog, turtle, and human forms. It is not unreasonable to regard them as being predominantly ancestral guardian depictions.

James Cook in 1778. Missionaries came in 1820 to bring the gospel of Christianity, and a general conversion to the new faith occurred by 1830. As a result, many traditional Hawaiian religious beliefs and rituals were quickly abandoned.

Our understanding of contemporary Hawaiian religion is far from complete, and often it is ambiguous and poorly defined. This paper will attempt to answer the question of which

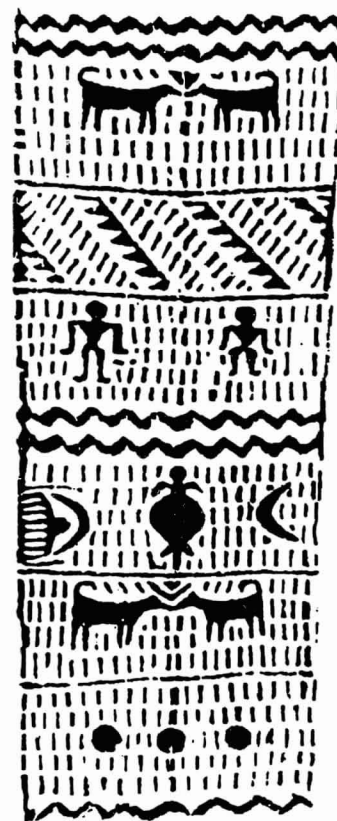


Figure 2: All Polynesians had beliefs in ancestral guardian spirits. These beliefs are often expressed in art symbolism. This Tongan war club is an example of this idea. In it we can see 'aumākua-like images including dogs, men, a turtle, and an octopus (Courtesy Bernice P. Bishop Museum)

1996 through 1999. My analysis relied upon Pukui's work as a framework to compare and contrast traditional beliefs and ritual with contemporary Hawaiian beliefs. Hawaiian informants are a fruitful source if one can locate and gain their confidence. I am very fortunate in that my father, Terence Barrow, has the trust of many individuals in the Hawaiian community. I was able to interview fourteen Hawaiians and one medical doctor, and I appreciate their friendship and help. Two of the fourteen are recognized Hawaiian *kahuna*. Most informants ranged from fifty to seventy years of age, with one man being over eighty years old. Most asked to remain anonymous due to the sensitive and sacred nature of the subject matter.

TRADITIONAL 'AUMĀKUA BELIEFS

We commence by examining the origin of the word. Pukui (1972:35) stated that 'aumakua was formed from "Au" meaning a period of time, current of time, era or eon, and "makua" meaning parent, generation, or ancestor. Professor Johnson added that, if we break down 'parent' we get "akua" which in turn means "god". If we break down the word, *akua*, we find the word *kua*, or "back". The root of *kua* can be seen in *kuamo'o* or spine. Interestingly *kuamo'o* 'ōlelo is defined as the spine and tongue or genealogy and tradition. In this manner the *a-kua* or "back" is the ancestor or ancestral god.

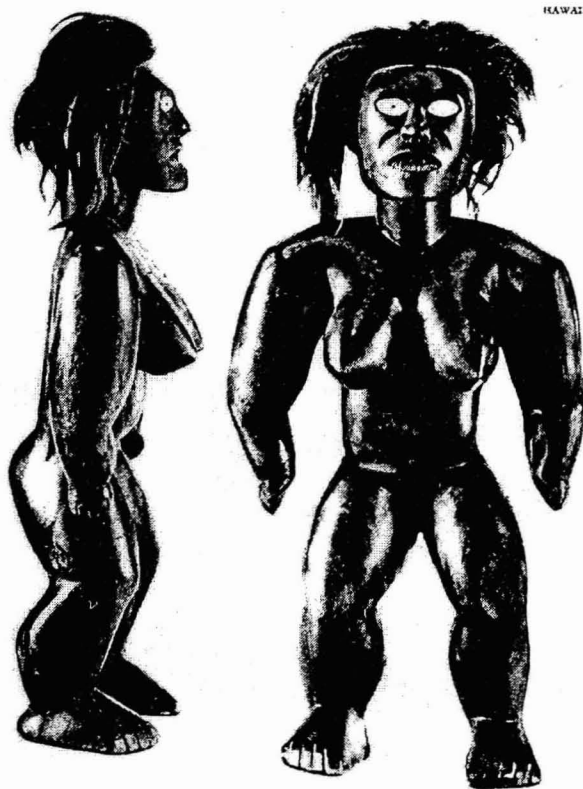


Figure 3. Two views of a goddess from Kawaihae, Hawaii. It was discovered in 1906 in a burial cave along with a number of other sculptural treasures (Courtesy, Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu).

With the word 'aumakua there is rich meaning but the composition of the word shows that 'aumakua are parents as

well as gods, in addition to being part of the family "backbone".

The 'aumakua originated as family members, relatives, or even parents. Ancestor spirits are transformed to gods over a period of time (*au*) or emerge from eternity (*Po*). Pukui (ibid.) expressed this concept in the following statement:

There is a sea of time so vast that man cannot know its boundaries, so fathomless that man cannot plumb its depths. Into the dark sea plunge the spirits of men, released from their earthly bodies. The sea becomes one with the sky and the land and the fiery surging that rise from the deep in the restless earth. For this is the measureless expanse of all space. This is the timelessness of all time. This is eternity. This is *Po*.

In the *Po* there dwell our ancestors, transfigured into gods. They are forever god-spirits possessing the strange and awesome powers of the gods. Yet they are forever our relatives, having for us that loving concern a mother has for infant, or a grandfather has for his first-born grandson.

Thus 'aumakua became family ancestor gods. Even though they dwelt in a spirit world, they were still relatives of the living and participated in the lives of their children and grandchildren.

Every family had many ancestors who corresponded with 'aumakua, and these took many physical forms (*kinolau*). Pukui (1972:36) could recall the names of fifty 'aumakua in her own family. These assumed tangible forms as *kinolau*. 'Aumakua could be sharks, owls, mud hens, lizards, eels, rats, caterpillars, rocks and plants. They could change from animal to mineral forms. In fact, creatures of similar physical form and characteristics were used interchangeably by 'aumakua. Pukui (ibid.) also noted that the 'aumakua inhabiting the caterpillar (*pe'elua*) could become the sea cucumber or *loli* in the ocean, and the 'aumakua of the mackerel or 'opelu was also associated with a variety of the lobelia plant that has leaves shaped and colored like the fish.

According to Pukui (ibid.:37) 'aumakua brought a warning of coming misfortune, or provided deliverance from immediate dangers. As family members, the 'aumakua had a loving concern for their descendants, and acted as guardians. They would often assume their 'aumakua body to communicate a warning of impending catastrophe. Pukui (ibid.) relates such an experience:

In our 'ohana we were taught to observe the owl. Owls were among the family 'aumakua. If an owl cried in



Figure 4. This particular figure was collected in 1825 at Honaunau Bay, Hawaii (Courtesy, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago).

a strange way, 'eu 'eu, that means 'get out of here today'. When I was in Puna, and owl came and sat in a breadfruit tree and cried 'eu 'eu. I told the aunt that I was visiting that I was going home right away, and I'm glad that I did, because when I got home I found that my *hanai* (foster child) was sick and feverish.

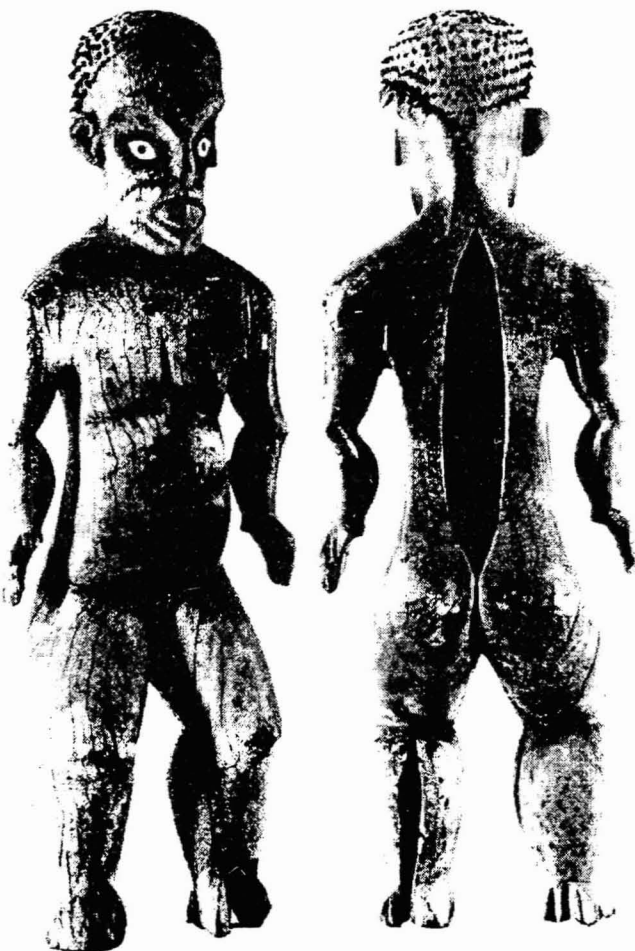


Figure 5. Kalaipahoa image from Oahu. The two views of this image reveal a typical sculptured form with the rare feature of six black lizards painted on the face. The sinister use of lizards as emissaries of evil is a feature of some Polynesian cultures and art (Courtesy, Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu).

The 'aumākua gave warnings, reprimands, or guidance to those sleeping. If one did something wrong unknowingly, one might be told in *hō'ike a ka pō* (a revelation in the night). This warned that one might be punished and gave one the opportunity to correct mistakes. If an individual offended or disrespected his guardian 'aumākua the spirit became angry or even malicious. One might offend an 'aumākua by eating its *kinolau*, or by breaking the various *kapu* of Hawaiian society. 'Aumākua were at times offended by behavior that harmed interpersonal relationships, as in cases of greed, dishonesty, and theft, and such behavior was punished. For example, a swollen hand marked a thief until he made restitution, and a swollen foot resulted from "going where you are not supposed to be".

An 'aumākua could place a curse (*anai*) on another person, but it might be "bounced back" by a stronger person with

greater psychic power. This would cause the first party illness and suffering.

Names were of primary importance in ancient Hawai'i. It was important to receive permission of an 'aumākua when naming a child. In Hawaiian tradition, names were generally *kapu*, particularly if they were the same as a specific ancestor. If one were to name a child after an ancestor without first making the correct rites and receiving permission, the child could be troubled with illness and afflicted with episodes of screaming or other symptoms. Naming a child after an ancestor required an 'oki or naming ceremony. In Hawaiian, 'oki means "to cut", referring to the custom of severing the umbilical cord, which in itself became an object of ritual treatment. In the context of the naming ceremony 'oki means to block the taboo or remove the *kapu* of the name before using it. During this ceremony, food was offered along with prayers to the family *aumākua* and this gave permission to use a particular name. To give a child an ancestral name (*inoa kupuna*) it was vital to first secure approval of a specific 'aumākua because the name was *kapu*. If permission was not obtained through this means, misfortune or disease could plague the child.

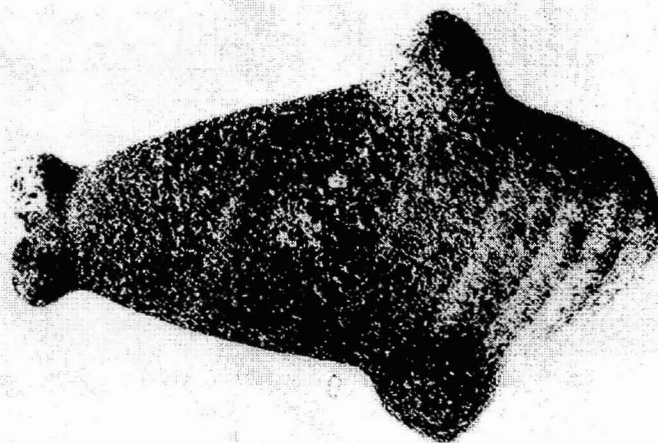


Figure 6. A stone sculpture said to represent the fisherman god Ku'ula from Kaua'i. This superb example of abstract sculpture in stone served as a vehicle for some helpful spirit (Courtesy, Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu).

However, by making offerings of food and sacrifice to 'aumākua one could reap the benefits of good fortune. Kamakau (1976:37) stated that planters who paid attention to their planting 'aumākua were rewarded with crops that were "free from stunting, shriveling, puniness and other afflictions such as rotting." Canoe makers were especially concerned with the correct prayer to their respective 'aumākua. They had the task of finding a suitable tree in the mountains for a canoe hull. A craftsman needed help from his 'aumākua to facilitate these works. Kamakau (ibid.:118) noted that a canoe builder and his apprentices chanted prayers to the 'aumākua for help in locating a suitable tree, and help in the laborious task of dragging the rough log to a shore workshop. They would then appeal to ancestral *aumākua* Kalaiwa'a whose spiritual descendants had been canoe makers for dozens of generations.

'Aumākua might also be spirits of the recently dead (an 'unihipili). 'Unihipili was the name for a bone or bundle of

bones (*pū'olo*) of a recently deceased relative. A *kahu* or keeper was appointed to protect these, for the '*unihipili* contained the spirit of the deceased and was regarded as a vehicle for the spirit. A certain amount of time had to elapse for a '*unihipili* to become an '*aumakua*. As an "infant spirit" it lacked independent judgment, so the *kahu* could summon it and send it on of errands of mercy, warning, or even destruction. To retain the services of the spirit, the *kahu* had to ritually *hanai* or 'feed' it through sacrificial offerings of kava or by other means. The '*unihipili* might become malicious and destructive to its *kahu* if neglected or angered. Pukui (1972:196) stated that if the *kahu* felt it unwise or dangerous to keep the '*unihipili* as a domestic presence he could release the spirit so it could merge into the eternal tranquility of Po (cosmic night). It was at this time that the spirit was turned into an '*aumakua* through the *kākū 'ai* ritual, discussed below.

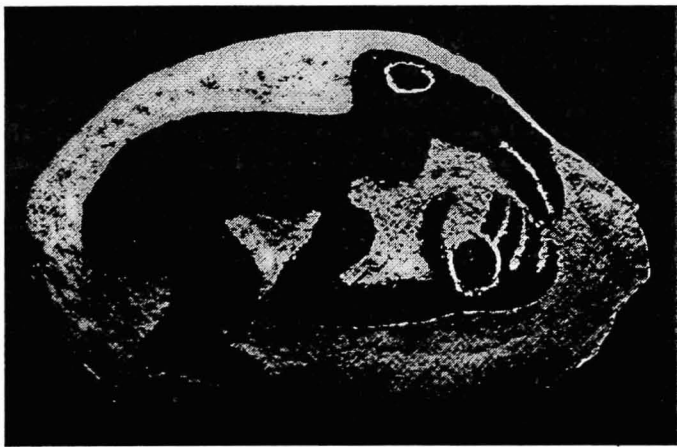


Figure 7. A birdman petroglyphs showing a possible ancestral spirit relating to the Birdman Cult of Makemake. This motif is prevalent in rock art and in some wood carvings of Rapa Nui (Museum of Mankind, London) (see Georgia Lee, *The Rock Art of Easter Island: Symbols of Power, Prayers to the Gods*, 1992).

The *kākū 'ai* ritual would transform a deceased family member into an '*aumakua*. In this ritual, the bones of the dead were taken to a place where the family gods resided. The *kākū 'ai* ritual involved the ceremonial drinking of *awa* (a narcotic pepper plant) and making incantations. Then the bones were interred in the place of the family gods. If the individual's '*aumakua* was shark, his bones were cast into the ocean. Any person devoted to the fire goddess Pele had their bones cast into a volcano. Pukui (1972:36) described the *kākū 'ai* as her forebears practiced the rites:

They would take the bones after the flesh was gone, wrap the bones in red and white tapa, and take them to the volcano, then the kahuna would prepare awa. After the awa had been poured into the crater, the bones were thrown down there. For generations, some of our folks were taken down there. Later, others who were related to the sharks were given the kaku 'ai ceremony and their bodies placed in the sea. The aumakua shark was supposed to take the bundle of bones, cover it with a shark belly fin, and care for it until the bundle of bones eventually turned into a shark.

Pukui (1972:46) observed that an '*aumakua* could enter the body and speak through a spiritual medium called a '*haka*'.

In early times each family had such talented individuals, and this gift was detected at birth. From childhood, the chosen person was trained in various occult rituals. When possessed by the '*aumakua*, the *haka* spoke in an unnatural voice thought to be that of the '*aumakua*. Questions were answered, problems solved, and the future predicted by the employment of a *haka*.

FIELD WORK ANALYSIS

According to my informants, there is little or no evidence that traditional rituals relating to the '*aumakua* are practiced today. When asked, most of my teachers knew the general process and nature of the ritual, but stated that the rites were no longer carried out. The *kākū 'ai* ritual and spirit possession by '*aumakua* through the *haka* seem to have faded away. None of my informants spoke of a specific naming ceremony, but concern for giving a child a proper name was apparent.

The following portion of this study is an analysis of my ethnographic field data revealing that some Hawaiians today hold strong traditional '*aumakua* beliefs.

Pukui (1972:38) defines '*aumakua* as spirits of deceased family members who retain a personal interest in the welfare of their living descendants. My fieldwork confirms that these ideas have persisted into the present. My Hawaiian informants all asserted that '*aumakua* comprise a part of their family. Sam Ka'ai, a noted *kahuna* of Maui, told me that '*aumakua* were his parents and relatives. These ancestral spirits are the foundations of family and belief; they are the universe around him. According to Ka'ai,

The aumakua are my guardians and guides. Their bones are mine and those of my children's after me. I have no confusion regarding God, for he is in front of me. I have no confusion as the aumakua are with me. They are not strangers. They are my parents, and their parents beyond them. When Hawaiians argue with their parents they are arguing with God.

To this he added:

I am an adherent of the ancient murmur. I keep pride in the ancient ancestors. Behind me there are seventy-nine generations. If I lost my relationship with them, I would be ship without a rudder. If you lose your relationship with them you cut off your connections with the naval of this world. I have my connection which passes down from father to son. I am true to myself and my ancestors because I stand on the residue with Maui.

Pukui stated that '*aumakua* assumed "*kinolau*". Again, my conversations with informants suggest that this belief clearly has survived into modern times. They told me stories of their personal '*aumakua* experiences. One anonymous informant related the following:

When I was a young girl I had my first aumakua experience. I was told by my parents to avoid a road which led to a certain area. I neglected this warning and continued down the road when I saw a beautiful dog with a shiny reddish coat. I stood there while the dog looked at me. The dog left and I never saw it again. Because my family owned many hunting dogs I thought that this must be one of them or perhaps a neighbor's dog. It was not until later that I realized our family did not have any such well groomed dogs and that this animal must be one our family aumakua.

Another (anonymous) informant is reputed to be a *kahuna*. He told me that he experienced night visits by 'aumakua in various forms. These are his words:

I had many nocturnal visitations by 'aumakua. One took the form of a large cuddly animal which would make it's presence known to me by pressing itself against my legs. Other creatures would sit on my chest or midriff which disturbed and annoyed me.

An old Hawaiian surfer of my acquaintance has strong beliefs in 'aumakua. For the past fifteen years, surfing has bought me into close contact with Hawaiians and their thinking about spiritual things vis-à-vis natural forces. I usually surf at Kewalo on the waterfront near Waikiki. Most of the people who surf there are Roosevelt High School graduates from the Hawaiian Homestead of Papakolea. Kewalo is known for its large tiger sharks. These 'killer' sharks are lured in by commercial fishermen when they clean their catch just outside the breaking surf. On one occasion I saw a huge shark prowling just outside the surf line. My reaction was to panic, as the majority of surfer's did, and then to paddle as quickly as I could to get out of the water. To my surprise this old Hawaiian surfer would choose to stay in the water despite the danger of a shark attack. His only response was to quietly sit on his surf board and lift his feet onto the deck of his long board. After a few years I got to know this man and asked him why he did not get out of the water. He replied that his family 'aumakua would not hurt him, and he respected sharks. For this reason he believed that sharks would not attack him.

One of my informants felt the presence of 'aumakua as a feeling that he must change something or act to keep himself or another out of danger. No visible spirit *kinolau* was seen yet he had distinct feelings when his 'aumakua was communicating with him.

Pukui stresses that the 'aumakua gave warnings of pending misfortune and at times this delivered one from immediate danger. Several of my informants told me how 'aumakua had helped them to avoid disaster and most believed that their 'aumakua were caring for them at all times. The girl who was confronted by a "large beautiful red dog" believed her family 'aumakua had delivered her from danger. Seeing the dog alerted her to impending danger and she turned around and walked in the opposite direction.

Professor Rubellite Johnson spoke of a fascinating 'aumakua experience on the Big Island of Hawai'i. She was driving with three relatives from Hilo to Puna at a high rate of speed in order to reach their destination before nightfall. Suddenly a large white owl with outspread wings landed on the front of the car. It was large enough to cover the whole windshield and it startled the passengers. Terrified, the driver slammed on the brakes. The owl flapped its wings and flew off. Johnson's family 'aumakua is the owl, so she had a premonition that this apparition had caused them to stop to prevent misfortune. They drove carefully for the remainder of their journey.

Johnson had another 'aumakua experience. Her daughter awakened early one morning and left for her job, as driver of a tour bus. She said goodbye to her mother, who was still asleep. Professor Johnson was 'told' in a dream that her daughter was in danger. It was at this point that her spirit, which she believed

to be 'kino wailua (a conscious "second soul") left her body. She found herself sitting next to her daughter in the bus. Her daughter was in grave danger for she had fallen asleep at the wheel while driving on the freeway. Johnson shouted to her daughter to wake up, but she did not respond. She reached over with one foot to press down on the brake pedal. Later, when questioned, the daughter said that she had indeed fallen asleep at the wheel when passing the Bishop Museum on the H-1 freeway and did not wake until the bus reached the Honolulu International Airport, a distance of several miles! The only explanation that Johnson could offer was that a spiritual force had protected her daughter and guided her to safety, and perhaps that



Mary Kawena Pukui, the great authority on Hawaiian language, custom and culture (Courtesy, George Bacon).

was an 'aumakua or greater intelligence.

Pukui states that 'aumakua gave warnings, reprimands and guidance through dreams. Several of my informants claimed 'aumakua communicated to them in that fashion. One told of a dream in which a brown owl, supposedly her 'aumakua, flew into her house, transformed into her brother, and told her the sex of her unborn child as well as what name she should give it.

To add an interesting note, I was told by a close friend of the lovable, yet infamous Sammy Amalu, that Sammy would often sit in a dreamlike state and converse with his 'aumakua. He did say that Mr. Amalu was an incredible trickster and con-artist, yet he was convinced of the authenticity of Sammy's 'aumakua visions.

My personal physician, who would like to remain anonymous for professional reasons, shared with me his many observations of elderly Hawaiians in various hospitals around Honolulu. This doctor treats many elderly sick Hawaiians and often sees them die. He had an old Hawaiian patient who lingered in a near-death condition and who spoke to an unseen entity. When the doctor asked the old man who he was talking to, he replied that he was speaking to his grandmother. The doctor said that this event was 'spooky' but he became accustomed to such communications because he observed them regularly among dying Hawaiians. According to the doctor, the people who visited these Hawaiians in their dreamlike states were grandparents, fathers, mothers, and even brothers and sisters. It is inter-

esting to note that, during the conversations, the question that often arose between the patient and spirit was whether it was permissible to leave the world of living. The deceased relative would often invite the patient to the next world or advise the person to stay on in the world of the living.

According to Pukui (1972:37) the *'aumākua* warned, protected and punished. If an individual offended his guardian *'aumākua* it became angry and even malicious. This aspect of *'aumākua* belief is alive and well today. One of my informants, a *kahuna* by practice, told me of his experience with a troublesome *'aumākua* spirit. This entity visited him regularly at night over a period of two years and caused all sorts of trouble. The person told me he is unpopular with some Hawaiians as he was believed to threaten people with curses. He was quite open on the matter of ghost haunting and described them to me in detail. My field notes read:

During a two-year period I had many nocturnal visits by what I believe to be a type of *aumākua*. This spirit would begin to make its presence known by such antics as jerking my bed covers, pulling my legs, or by sitting heavily on my chest. Once it came in the form of a wind that started by barely rippling my bed covers but soon mounted to a gale force of perhaps forty or fifty mile an hour that pushed me toward the wall until my loud shouts made it vanish. Another *kahuna*, came to help me exorcise this bother some entity and it no longer returned to disturb my night.



Professor Rubellite Kawena Johnson, one of Hawai'i's living legends (Courtesy, R. Johnson).

Another informant believed that terrible misfortunes plagued a man due to the disrespect for his *'aumākua*. The following are my notes on one such case:

The subject lived on Kaua'i and suffered great misfortunes. He was mysteriously getting into bad situations due to his disregard and disrespect for his *'aumākua*. It was believed that this man's *'aumākua* was a type of shark. He offended his *'aumākua* by hooking sharks from the sea and making their skins into drum heads.

One of my students is a young man from Kalani High School in Honolulu and a member of the David Malo family. He said that many members of his family both past and present have been cursed by *'aumākua*. Their belief is that the family spirits were offended because of the sale of ancestral land, and

were punishing family members, particularly male members. Untimely deaths and illnesses that have afflicted the family over the past decades is attributed to anger of the *'aumākua*.

Another informant told me that her male relatives were plagued by various troubles because their given names were not correctly acquired. When the informant reached the age of eighteen, she elected to get rid of the name for she believed it bought down the malice of the *'aumākua*.

I have not found any cases where *'aumākua* served as an agent of a curse apart from the present-day *kahuna* mentioned above. Whether he used *'aumākua* as cursing vehicles is unclear.

Kamakau (1976:37) stated that if one cared for family *'aumākua* by regular food offerings, sacrifices and rites, one could secure goodwill and enjoy the benefit of good fortune. I found solid evidence in my field research indicating that this belief has carried into modern times. Sam Ka'ai insisted on the efficacy of prayer addressed to *'aumākua*. It not only retained the goodwill of his ancestors but helped him to keep 'in touch' with his spirit family. I quote his words:

Prayer (to the *'aumākua*) is required for commonsense and to stay in tune with spiritual beings. You are a spiritual being. You can loiter on the path, but you cannot get off. Prayer keeps one from being diverted.

Sam Ka'ai continually affirmed that one must care for ancestors and maintain a good relationship to them in order to be in tune with reality in the world of the living, adding:

When one prays it is as if he is being a good host with his father. He is keeping a close relation with his ancestors. Huna is the keeper of the secret. The secret revealed is Ola. I pray in the time of Po (the period in which the primal parents dwelled prior to giving birth to many god sons).

An anonymous friend was kind enough to share a prayer of supplication taught to her by her father. This prayer of petition had a forceful and even demanding tone. She stated:

My father taught me a prayer of petition to family *'aumākua*. I was surprised to find that the prayer reflected a relationship of myself to the *'aumākua* that was on a similar tone. The prayer was demanding, and my father insisted that I used a correct forceful manner in my intonations. The relationship between *'aumākua* seemed reciprocal yet I was not begging. I was using my birthright.

Mahina Rapu (personal communication) told me that many Hawaiians still pray to their *'aumākua*. According to her, prayer was very important in the lives of Polynesians. She shared a prayer to an *'aumākua*, claiming it is still used by many Hawaiians today. She informed me that among Hawaiians today, it was considered an honor to have the ability to *pule* (pray) in the proper manner. It asks for safety, knowledge, insight and mana. Mahina has translated this prayer into English:

Ye Ancestors all around us
From the Zenith above to the horizons
Those behind
Those in front, those above
A breathing in the heavens
An utterance in the heavens
A clear ringing voice in the heavens
A voice reverberating in the heavens

Safeguard me/us
Growth to the heavens
Growth to the earth

Nā 'amākua, mai ka lā hiki, a ka lā kau
Mai ka ho'oku'i a ka hālāwai
Nā 'amākua iā kahina kua
Iā kahina alo, iā ka 'ākau i ka lani
O kiha i ka lani
Owē i ka lani
Nunulu i ka lani
Kāholo i ka lani
Eia ka pulapula a'oukou o
E mālama 'oukou iā mākou
E ulu i ka lani
E ulu i ka 'hōnua

Growth to the Hawaiian chain of islands	E ulu i ka pae 'āina o Hawai'i
Grant knowledge	E hōmai ka 'ike
Grant strength	E hōmai ka ikaika
Grant intelligence	E hōmai ke akamai
Grant divine understanding	E hōmai ka maopopo pono
Grant intuition/insight	E hōmai ka 'ike papalua
Grant mana	E hōmai ka mana

DECEASED 'AUMĀKUA AS 'UNIHIPILI

Pukui (1972:196) wrote that *'unihipili* were bundles of bones containing the spirit of a deceased person. Related to this, the *'unihipili* of the recently deceased required a certain amount of time in order to become an *'aumakua*. It was during this time that the spirit could be used to curse people. I have only found one reference in my field interviews that relates to the *'unihipili* belief today. One of my informants told me that her friend saw *ahapulele* (flying fireballs) one night. This lady was said to have become very agitated because she believed that this spirit might have been an *'unihipili*, sent to do her harm.

Certain themes and patterns of data in my field research point to distinct conclusions in regard to the nature of Hawaiian religion today. Evidence indicates that traditional Hawaiian rituals relating to *'aumākua* have no current uses. Despite this, there is evidence that traditional *'aumākua* beliefs, as described by Pukui, do persist to the present.

My method of research was to take Pukui's statements and compare them point by point with my fieldwork in order to reach a conclusion on the nature of *'aumākua* beliefs today. The following section shows the amount of correlation of my fieldwork data with traditional beliefs. I have divided my findings into two categories. The first category indicates beliefs that have persisted into the present. The second category refers to rituals and beliefs that exhibit little or no evidence in regards to practices today.

1. Beliefs that persist into the present

(a) Identity and origin of *'aumākua* as family members. This belief is strongly supported by my data. All my informants believed that their *'aumākua* were related to them as family members much in the same way one is related to parents, grandparents, and great grandparents.

(b) The *'aumakua* protects its family members. This idea has persisted into the present. Many of my informants experienced episodes in which *aumakua* saved them from disaster and they have strong beliefs that they are protected in times of danger.

(c) The *'aumākua* assumed a number of physical manifestations (*kino lau*). This traditional belief has also survived into the present. Some of my informants described their meeting with *'aumākua* in various forms such as owls and dogs.

(d) Prayers to *'aumākua* for good fortune. This persists into the present. Prayers to *'aumākua* are still chanted and are taught to the next generation by some parents.

(e) The *aumākua* punished wrongdoing. This idea was a strong point that emerged from my survey. A number of my informants firmly believe that an *'aumakua* can be malicious and harmful if disrespected or neglected. Disrespect may take the form of holding a *kapu* name, neglecting ones family, or through insults as using its animal form for food.

(f) The *'aumākua* communicated through dreams. This is another strong theme. Many informants told me how their *'aumākua* visited them in their dreams and warned them of coming danger, as well as informing them as to the best personal names to take.

2) Rituals and beliefs no longer in use

a) There is doubtful evidence in regard to *'aumākua* as agent of a curse. I know one contemporary *kahuna* who curses others. Whether or not he used his *'aumākua* is unknown.

b) In my fieldwork I found little evidence that the *'unihipili*-type spirit was regarded today. This belief seems to have faded into the past. As for rituals in relation to *'aumākua*, I have found no evidence that such traditional rituals are practiced in the present. Sam Ka'ai agreed that these rituals are no longer performed.

CONCLUSION

Traditional Hawaiian culture and religious beliefs are in a very dynamic state. To study the Hawaiian beliefs of the past in relation to the present, it is necessary to view Hawaiian religion in its dynamic aspect. John Charlot (1983:35) in his perceptive book entitled *Chanting the Universe*, expressed this idea:

Hawaiian religion should not be, therefore, described as a static, integrated system with a hierarchy of gods. Hawaiian religion can be compared as a category to Hinduism and Buddhism, rubrics that cover a host of the irreconcilable differences. Hawaiian religious history is in a continual movement as the sea. One can study the currents, the dynamisms and process of change, but one cannot reconcile the directions of individual waves.

With this quote in mind, what are the processes of change in Hawaiian religion? A key element that has changed or modified the Hawaiian belief system is the abandonment of the *kapu* system. The *mana* and *kapu* power of the priestly orders of *kahuna* were laid aside along with the impersonal gods of Kū, Kanaloa, Lono and Kāne in 1819 by the edicts and acts of King Kamehameha II. After this point, what was left? What was the important basis of Hawaiian belief and religion that survived from past to the present? Charlot (ibid.) offers us guidance:

Individualism was more highly developed and prized in Hawaii than in many Polynesian cultures, yet the sense of family, that is the extended family, was a principal factor in the normal person's sense of identity. A large intimate family community, comprising several generations and living stably from time immemorial on a piece of land stretching from the mountains to the sea, provided the individual with a complete and rich experience of life.

He added:

The family was a vital center of social and cultural activity. Genealogies and family histories were carefully transmitted, along with chants and dances. Events including imported stages of life; births, name giving, house blessings, rivalries with other families, deaths and so on were occasions for new compositions building on earlier patterns. In a sense each family had its own religious system in its family gods (*aumakua*). Most *aumakua* were ancestors who had been transformed through prayers and offerings into abiding evidences and aids. Each family had their proverbs

and ethical maxims with which their traditions were imbued. Families also handed down cherished mementos, works of art and artifacts. Many Hawaiian families continue their cultural traditions today.

Charlot stresses that all of Hawaiian life centers around the extended family. The family was the basis of experience and center of cultural activity as well as the principal factor in personal identity. One learned his tradition through the extended family and through this he would determine who his ancestors or 'aumākua were by name. The 'aumākua and extended family were and still are intimately related and can be closely identified.

The 'aumākua are to this day an integral part of the generational lineage of the Hawaiian extended family. Professor Johnson believes that 'aumākua were a link in the generational line of the extended family. To explain this point she used me as an example: I would be in the *keiki* generation; my father and mother would be in the *makua* or parental generation. If I had children, my parents would move up to the *kupuna* or grandparent level, and I would move up to the *makua* generation. She added that from the *kupuna* generation it is only a short jump up to the 'aumākua. At my parent's death they would become my 'aumākua along with their parents and their grandparents, and so on. She spoke of this process as if there was no differentiation between natural and the supernatural. It did not matter if some members of your family were long dead; they were still intimately related because they were part of the lineage and the extended family.

What is basic is that this strong Hawaiian sense of extended family with its attached notions of 'aumākua are what have survived the abandonment of the kapu system and western cultural impact. Many Hawaiians today have strong 'aumākua beliefs yet do not practice the related ritual traditional ceremonies. In fact these beliefs are strikingly similar to pre-European beliefs of old Hawai'i, as recorded by Pukui. These beliefs include knowledge that aumākua are loving family members who protect, advise and punish. They take many bodies and communicate to dreams or by manifestations of living animals with all natural phenomenon being 'signs' (*ho'ailona*) of the 'aumākua's continuing presence and care for their living descendants.

This paper can be summed up by a comment from Professor Johnson: "Hawaiians always had the family. The reason for this is that the Hawaiians really care about their relatives. The same is with our 'aumākua. As a child will always run to his parents, an 'aumākua will always protect us as children."

The belief in ancestral spirits of the 'aumākua is latent but alive and well in Hawai'i today. It will be of great interest to see what the future holds for the dynamic process of Hawaiian religion with its 'aumākua beliefs. I will end this paper with a perceptive comment from my teacher, Professor Johnson: "It can only get better because all humans belong to the same origins in the world. We are the 'aumākua of the whole next, entire human generations. That is the message: that there is one source with many manifestations."

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Of the generation succeeding her we have the distinguished Hawaiian Professor Rubellite Kawena Johnson. I am indebted to her as one of my principal teachers as well as a family friend for decades. I am grateful for her free and open knowledge of 'aumākua. I thank also Mahina Rapu, the distinguished lady of Rapa Nui. Her guidance and friendship, her knowledge of Hawaiian *kupuna* of today and their prayers was very helpful in defining contemporary beliefs of Hawaiians.

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